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SUBJECT: NEW IDPS IN ITURI

REF: A. KINSHASA 343

[1](#)B. KINSHASA 359

[1](#)C. KINSHASA 378

[1](#)D. KINSHASA 478

[1](#)1. (U) Summary. Approximately 13,000 new IDPs fleeing fighting between FARDC forces and local militia in southern Ituri have arrived in Cantonnier, 18 kilometers southeast of Bunia. Emergency humanitarian needs have largely been addressed, though more IDPs continue to arrive every day. Prospects for a quick return are not good, since the FARDC, weakened by a mutiny among some troops, was forced into a retreat during the last major offensive, allowing militia elements to regroup and rearm. Militia activity increased significantly in March, and many observers are now concerned that security may actually worsen in the coming weeks as militias recruit new elements from among the ranks of dissatisfied former combatants. Some observers worry that the Ituri conflict may now have entered a new guerilla phase. One positive development, however, is that ethnicity appears to play a smaller role in the Ituri conflict. End summary.

Humanitarian Situation

[1](#)2. (U) On March 20, USAID/OFDA Rep Jay Nash talked to a new group of IDPs in the town of Cantonnier (also known as Katoni or Kotonni), 18 kilometers southeast of Bunia on the road leading to Kasenyi on Lake Albert. These IDPs had fled fighting between FARDC troops and the anti-government militia led by Cobra Matata from March 6 to 11. The IDPs arrived from a variety of villages in southern Ituri, including areas near the towns of Tcheysi, Gethy, Aveba, and Songolo.

[1](#)3. (U) The IDPs in Cantonnier numbered approximately 13,000 according to German Agro-Action (GAA), and most are living with host families. Residents of Cantonnier are of Lendu ethnicity, but the IDPs, who are of Ngiti ethnicity, were reported to have been well received by the local

population. An estimated 4,000 are staying in a makeshift IDP camp located next to the primary school of Cantonnier, and some are spending nights in the school itself, vacating the premises every morning so school can continue. Some IDPs reported that more IDP families are arriving from the troubled areas every day.

¶4. (U) At the outset of the crisis, many of these IDPs originally fled past Cantonnier to the southern neighborhoods of Bunia or to the hills around the town of Zumbe to the north of Cantonnier. The IDPs apparently feared that the fighting would move northward and eventually reach the main east-west road. Many of these IDP families have now, however, returned to Cantonnier where they are often able to earn some cash by assisting the residents with work in their fields. An estimated 5,000 IDPs remain in the Bunia neighborhoods of Yambi and Kindia. At the time of OFDA Rep's visit to Zumbe, local authorities reported approximately 200 IDPs were still present.

¶5. (U) IDPs in Cantonnier have received assistance in food and non-food supplies since the first groups arrived, and have made relatively few complaints. GAA has distributed WFP food rations, and UNICEF partner NGOs Cesvi (Italian) and Solidarites (French) have addressed most non-food and water/sanitation needs respectively, using UNICEF contingency stocks. (Note: USAID/OFDA contributes every year to these stocks, and at Cantonnier, USAID-branded plastic sheeting could be seen on the latrines and water purification facilities. End Note.)

¶6. (U) Using UNICEF-provided materials, Cesvi had put up a new temporary primary school so that IDP children can continue their education. IDPs expressed their wish that UNICEF now provide shelter for secondary school students, and that school materials, including notebooks, pens, and books, be distributed. IDP leaders are concerned that final-year secondary school students may miss the critical state exams in July and thus be precluded from graduating this year.

Security

¶7. (U) IDPs with whom OFDA Rep spoke said they would not consider returning home until the area had been definitively cleared of militia elements. Having fled the area, they believe they will be considered to be government sympathizers if they return home and subsequently meet up with any militiamen.

¶8. (U) The civilian population of this area often suffers from violence committed by both sides of the conflict. When they come to villages, the militiamen loot, rape, burn houses, and kidnap men to forcibly join their ranks. When the area is retaken by FARDC forces, those found in the towns or surrounding areas are often considered to be militia or militia sympathizers. Remaining men found will often be beaten or killed, and many of the women will be raped. Any remaining belongings are confiscated.

¶9. (U) When asked about their security at Cantonnier, the IDPs said conditions were less than ideal. Harassment by FARDC troops stationed in the town is not a major problem most of the time, but when there is insecurity in the area, the troops "get stirred up" and tend to go on a rampage, accusing everyone of being militia and mistreating them accordingly. At such times, civilians flee into the hills of Zumbe until the crisis is over. IDPs felt their security would improve dramatically if MONUC sent some troops to the area to both discourage militia attacks in the area and act to as a damper on the FARDC's activities.

Background

¶10. (U) In early March, MONUC and FARDC forces launched a joint offensive against the militia that is under the direction of Cobra Matata in the Tcheyi area south of Aveba in southern Ituri. (reftel A) The offensive, however, failed dramatically in just two days time, and resulted in the government-loyal forces losing considerable territory in southern Ituri to the MRC militia. (reftel B) Fearing the arrival of either militia or government troops in their villages, much of the population of the area fled northward to the Bunia-Kasenyi road and beyond.

¶11. (U) One reason for the quick MONUC-FARDC defeat and retreat to Kagaba, north of Aveba, was a mutiny by some of the FARDC troops. Part of the FARDC force deployed for the offensive consisted of a "commando" unit deployed from Aba in Haut-Uele District to support the Ituri FARDC troops. On the second day of fighting, some in the FARDC commando unit returned to Aveba from the front line at Tcheyi and attempted to kill the FARDC commander (General "Bob" Ngoie). The commando unit succeeded in raiding MONUC supplies, but was eventually disarmed and sent back to Bunia to face courts-martial. (reftel C)

¶12. (U) Details surrounding the mutiny are not clear, but during a visit to the central prison in Bunia, where some thirty "leaders" of the mutiny are now being held, the OFDA Rep was able to hear their version of events. The FARDC commandos were the "lead" unit in the offensive against Tcheyi. When they began the battle, they said they were surprised to see many of the militia forces wearing FARDC uniforms. They claimed they were relatively successful at holding their own against the enemy, but ran out of ammunition on the second day. When they asked for more supplies, the FARDC commandos said they were told none were available and were subsequently ordered to retreat. At this point the commandos began to think that they had been set up by the FARDC commander in charge, General "Bob" Ngoie, to be slaughtered, or at a minimum, badly humiliated. The commandos claimed it was for these reasons that when they retreated back to the command post at Aveba they attacked the general personally. They then raided MONUC supplies because they were hungry and had felt abandoned.

¶13. (U) Comment: Whatever credibility is given to the commandos' allegations, it seems likely that this is what the commando group genuinely came to believe at some point during the battle and thus probably is the reason for the mutiny. It is probable, even, that the commandos thought they would be vindicated once they were able to tell their story and get the information about General Bob out to the military hierarchy. End comment.

General consequences of the FARDC setback in Aveba-Tcheyi

¶14. (U) MONUC and humanitarian organizations working in Ituri believe the failure of the FARDC/MONUC joint operation in Tcheyi has had serious negative consequences. Since then, there have been numerous attacks by three different militia groups, all belonging in name to the MRC umbrella militia organization, on FARDC positions in a number of different parts of Ituri. (reftel D)

¶15. (U) As most of Ituri (with the exception of the Tcheyi area) was calm prior to the failed Tcheyi military offensive, many observers regard the recent attacks as a direct result of the various militias having been emboldened by the perceived weakness of the FARDC. There are also, however, persistent rumors that militia leaders are successfully recruiting new fighters by offering \$50 to anyone who will join. Few of the 17,000 combatants in Ituri demobilized by MONUC last spring are apparently satisfied with their post-demobilization benefits

packages, creating a successful environment for militia recruiting efforts.

¶16. (U) Two popular theories attribute the recent insecurity to sources outside Ituri district. The first theory suggests that the attacks are part of a full-fledged destabilization campaign (bankrolled by Kinshasa politicians) who want to disrupt elections in Ituri. In this hypothesis, the non-participation of Ituri would provide losing politicians a motive for declaring the election results invalid.

¶17. (U) Another theory notes that this has all happened as the Uganda government has warned of a possible invasion of the DRC if local authorities do not dislodge the LRA in Garamba National Park. This theory suggests Uganda wants to split FARDC attention between Garamba and Ituri so as to better be able to continue having access to mineral resources. (NOTE: MONUC authorities regard Uganda's threats of invasion as pure political posturing meant to assuage domestic constituencies. End Note.)

¶18. (U) Whatever the cause(s) of the increase in militia activity in Ituri, it is generally thought by humanitarians and military alike that it will be important for MONUC and FARDC to mount a successful counterattack quickly before insecurity spreads. MONUC officials in Ituri said the militias have adopted a strategy of dispersing into small groups scattered throughout southern and central Ituri. By staging small attacks on villages and then quickly retreating, these groups convey a picture of significant instability in the region, and will be more difficult for MONUC and the FARDC to eliminate. Several MONUC authorities said the Ituri conflict has now entered a new "guerilla" phase.

Planned counterattack

¶19. (U) MONUC officials said that a counterattack is being planned, and FARDC leadership is sending additional troops from North Kivu to replace the mutineer commando unit. (reftel D) MONUC continues to be concerned whether the FARDC will be successful against the militias, even with additional reinforcements. MONUC officers reported that in battle, FARDC troops tended to panic, discharging their weapons frantically in a completely disorderly fashion, thereby depleting their ammunition without gaining any military advantage.

¶20. (U) The Pakistani contingent of MONUC provided one week of additional training to the first battalion to arrive from North Kivu during the week of March 13. Some members of the battalion were among those trained over a period of three months by various MONUC contingents last year. During a presentation by the full battalion, the OFDA Rep had the opportunity to ask the troops directly if they thought they had been sufficiently trained. They responded affirmatively, adding that they were anxious to start fighting the militias. They asked only that they be given sufficient equipment and ammunition. (NOTE: The battalion is of mixed composition, and a show of hands revealed relatively even representation of ex-government, ex-RCD Goma, ex-MLC, and ex-Mai Mai elements.)

¶21. (U) Another concern of MONUC staff is that plans for the offensive may be leaked to the militias. It has been their experience that the militia seems to have been well informed ahead of time of the details of any joint MONUC-FARDC operations. As MONUC does not have the authority to conduct major operations completely on its own, this problem of being unable to mount a surprise offensive is likely to continue.

Prospects

¶22. (U) Some observers believe that if outside sources are financing new recruitment among the militias, and if the FARDC cannot soon re-establish its authority in the areas of southern Ituri that it once controlled, the prospects for providing a safe environment for elections in Ituri will be limited. Many observers, even within MONUC, are openly pessimistic that Ituri can be returned to pre-March levels of security before elections are held in June.

¶23. (U) One very well-informed local source that OFDA contacted, however, believed the situation was not nearly as grim as it appeared. This person noted that though the road to Kasenyi had closed briefly due to insecurity, commercial traffic and NGO traffic had now fully resumed. Similarly, though Aveba and Gethy had been briefly abandoned by FARDC, there were once again FARDC units in place there. Since the militia stronghold of Tcheysi was also empty, the MRC could be viewed even as having lost territory.

¶24. (U) On the subject of militia dispersion, this observer said the phenomenon was more due to disagreement, splintering and differing visions among the militia leaders than to a conscious, coordinated strategy. Ngiti leaders Owudu and Cobra are no longer together, with the former joining Hema militia leader Saidi to form a smaller, very militant group in the southern Lake Albert area. Cobra, however, is making signs that he and his second in command, Dark, might be willing to surrender to MONUC. Lendu militia leader Ngudjolo is responsible for the attacks on the towns of Kakwa/Cafe and Katoto, but his actions have been condemned by leaders of the Lendu community in the area where he is operating. Though Peter Karim's men still cause trouble in the Nioka-Kwandromo area, their leader has reportedly retreated to a position in the bush 60 kilometers west of these towns.

¶25. (U) Whichever analysis proves more accurate, OFDA Rep observed that Ituri seems much less ethnically divided than in the past. Indeed, if instability continues or expands, it seems unlikely that it will, at least initially, be ethnically based. During his visit, OFDA Rep had the opportunity to talk to three different groups of ex-combatants working in various reintegration projects. All of these groups were ethnically mixed, with all former major ethnic militias represented in each, and the ex-militiamen all appeared remarkably at ease with one another. When asked, they treated the question of ethnicity as if it had no importance at all, pointing out that even the militias that were still active in the bush are now of mixed ethnicity. This facility of integration among ex-combatants is consistent with the very reconciliatory attitudes of many Ituri civilians with whom OFDA Rep has discussed ethnicity in past visits. It lends further support to the view that the ethnic animosities of the past were largely the result of manipulations of the populations by various warlords jostling for control of Ituri's resources.

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